

Incorporating Library Instruction into English Classes

Robin NAGANO

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Introduction

This paper gives some background into the state of library instruction in Japan and the process gone through in North America and the United Kingdom in the past few decades, with special reference to the bibliographic instruction program at Earlham College. I then describe two attempts at incorporating library instruction into English courses in a Japanese engineering university. The aims of such an endeavor are: (1) to acquaint students with the library resources available to them, (2) to raise their awareness of the role of English in research in engineering, and (3) to connect English with some activity of relevance to their lives.

Although a formal survey of library use and knowledge of library resources at this institution has not yet been performed, informal surveys and discussions have revealed that students, especially undergraduate students, have little knowledge of how to use the library effectively, and have had few opportunities to receive bibliographic instruction. This seems to be a relatively common phenomenon in Japanese universities.

A survey (Murakami, Oshiro and Ikushima, 1995) of 165 medium-sized public (including national) and private Japanese universities revealed that only 64% of them offered any formal instruction to undergraduate students beyond a brief introduction during the university-wide orientation at enrollment (and 20% did not even offer that!).

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Even when detailed instruction was available, the average number of participating students was low, at just over 100 per year for instruction in general topics and around 280 for instruction on specific topics related to one class or research area (normally requested by a faculty member). For general topics, the most common pattern was instruction at the request of a faculty member or voluntary attendance in a library-initiated instruction session. This study found that, on the whole, public universities offer somewhat less formal instruction in library use than do private universities. This was particularly clear in relation to instruction in the use of relatively new technologies. Of the libraries that made their on-line catalogs available to students, 53% of public and 63% of private universities offered instruction, while 38% of public and 52% of private universities offered formal guidance in the use of CD-ROMs. For databases, instruction was offered at 24% of the private and 5% of the public universities.

A survey of students at a private Japanese university regarding library use found a correlation between area of studies and answers to the question "Have you ever been taught how to use a library?" (Okada, 1994). The percentage of students reporting having been taught in university was 19% in the natural sciences, and 30% in both social sciences and humanities. Similarly, fewer students in the natural sciences reported having been taught in detail (at any time): natural sciences, 36%; social sciences 51%; humanities, 45%. As this study took place at only one university, it cannot be generalized from, but it does hint at students either receiving different amounts of instruction or evaluating or recalling it somewhat differently according to their area of studies.

Changes in Bibliographic Instruction

Japanese university libraries taken as a whole seem to be less concerned with and active in user education and bibliographic instruction than academic and research libraries in North America and the United Kingdom. From around the 1960s, interest in the U.S. and the U.K.

seemed to focus on orientation and the use of visual aids to make the library not only more understandable but also more approachable (e.g. Tidmarsh, 1968; Fjällbrant and Stevenson, 1978; Lewis and Foster, 1978). Student needs were given more consideration, as was creating a user-friendly atmosphere and taking a look at the physical layout and signposting of the library. At the same time, there was growing recognition that the timing of instruction was important, and that the most effective time for library instruction was the point of need, that is, guiding students in library research skills was most effective when those skills were needed to complete an assignment. Library courses were introduced, most often taught by librarians, but sometimes by faculty members, or librarian-faculty teams. These moved from one-shot lectures in the classroom towards multiple in-library sessions. Hands-on, active tasks in the library were incorporated. Gradually, course-integrated library assignments have come to be seen as one ideal, requiring team-planning between librarians and course teachers. These are seen as not only aiding students in completing their assignments in that particular class, but also in gaining skills applicable to further studies both in and out of the classroom. Another approach has been the formation of comprehensive, credit-bearing courses⁽¹⁾, which normally focus on completing some project involving research, such as that described in Nolf (1993).

The example of Earlham College

One of the colleges that first moved to integrate bibliographic instruction into undergraduate classes in various disciplines is Earlham College, a small private liberal arts college in the United States⁽²⁾. In addition to the built-in role of bibliographic instruction in the core humanities classes required for all first-year students, other general education classes also make liberal use of bibliographic instruction; a total of 37% of the general education courses incorporate it (Penhale, Taylor, and Kirk, 1997). As well, there are many professors who are eager to incorporate it into upper-level classes. Written assignments

are common in all disciplines, and classes with library use made up 51% of the total courses offered to the class graduating in 1993. Naturally, this varied by department, even within the natural sciences (see Table 1).

Table 1. Natural Science courses offered to the 1993 graduating class, Earlham College (from Penhale et al., 1997)

Department	% of courses with library use	% of library use classes with bibliographic instruction
Biology	86%	61%
Chemistry	46%	80%
Geology	53%	54%
Math	6%	25%
Physics	7%	25%

The graduates examined in this study thus received bibliographic instruction on multiple occasions, both in general education and in departmental classes. The percentage of courses with bibliographic instruction taken by a graduating student ranged from 18% (geology majors) to 52% (history majors).

Penhale (1996) reports that planning classes that integrate library use and especially bibliographic instruction can be extremely time-consuming. Nonetheless, one biology professor justifies this expenditure in preparation and class time:

"One of the reasons that we spend a lot of time and energy in the introductory courses for biology majors is that the curriculum really builds on the student experience gained in that instruction. So we invest time in teaching students not just how to access the literature, but also how to read and analyze it....I am willing to give up class time to do instruction and to do library work because it is going to be beneficial for the students in the future." (Penhale, 1996: 126)

Another instructor states that, "Our graduates consistently rate their literature accessing skills as one of the most important abilities they have learned during their college experience. In biology, effective library use is essential to professional competence" (Stephenson, 1993: 30).⁽³⁾

At Nagaoka University of Technology

Students and faculty at Nagaoka University of Technology have the advantage of easy access to an efficient academic library specializing in engineering. The serials collection is particularly strong. In addition, several search instruments are available, some in printed form, others in electronic, via the library's homepage or on CD-ROM.

However, informal surveys reveal that many students are unfamiliar with the library's contents and services. Most have probably had no prior exposure to an academic library, and have not received any formal instruction in library use, unless they have voluntarily participated in a library-initiated orientation session. There seems to be little if any library use connected with classes. Bibliographic instruction is available if requested by students or faculty members, but according to library staff, requests for formal group instruction are few. Counter staff are limited and have multiple duties. These problems are shared by university libraries throughout Japan, and compounded by lack of training in the field. For instance, only half of the library staff in national universities have undergone training in the field (Sunaga, 1996).

Two approaches

As I feel that library skills are essential for producing independent learners, both in university and after graduation, I have attempted to incorporate library instruction in some of the English classes I have taught. Two approaches will be described below.⁽⁴⁾ The second, especially, builds upon task-based learning, summarized by Willis (1998) as "a goal-oriented activity with a clear purpose". The focus is

on meaning rather than form, and there is concern with both process and product (Markee, 1997).

A "one-shot" visit and worksheet assignment

The first stage involved planning with the library staff. Naturally, the cooperation of the library staff is essential for a project such as this. The staff were more than willing to speak to the students about basic methods for seeking out information in the library. We agreed on a day and reserved some of the computers.

I administered a questionnaire in the class session prior to our visit to the library. This was both to gain some idea of student use and to lead the students to think about the library. Some results: most students reported spending some time in the library, with 56% spending 4-8 hours per month, while some spent considerably more time there. However, only 26% of the students said their primary goal was to look for information, a far lower number than those who went to study there. Most students had checked out a few books during the year, but some had never done so. The computers were a big draw (for WWW browsing and e-mail), as were photocopying facilities.

One area of particular concern to me is students' unfamiliarity with specialized academic journals (Table 2), which will become a major source of information for them as they begin research upon specialized topics as fourth-year students and as graduate students. I hoped to make them aware of the existence and numbers of these, as well as call attention to the fact that most are in English, and thus there is a need to study English in order to be able to decipher journal articles in their field.

For the visit itself, worksheets were prepared requiring students to look for and at journals, use reference books, and find books both in the on-line cataloging system and on the shelves. I prepared several versions to discourage copying. The worksheets were for use during the visit and as homework, and were to be completed either in pairs

Table 2. Percentage of third-year students using specialized journals
(n=43)

journals written in English		Journals written in Japanese	
current issues	2%	current issues	7%
back issues	2%	back issues	4%

or alone, according to the student's preference. Students in two areas of engineering were enrolled, and I thus prepared a slightly different set of questions to be answered by each (see the appendix for an example).

During the 80-minute visit, students were first introduced to major services, the library's home page, and conducting on-line searches of the library's collection. This was done by the library staff, in Japanese. The remainder of the time was for students to scatter and begin their worksheets.

Reactions from the students were positive, and there were numerous comments on how useful it was to have the on-line search function and other features of the library homepage explained. Other students mentioned finding interesting magazines, becoming more interested in the Internet, and feeling more comfortable in the library. My favorite comment: "I'll be a library master."

Creating an English guide to using the library

Due to the success of the above "one-shot" visit, I began to consider ways to make library-centered tasks a regular part of this third-year class. I decided to ask students to explain in writing how to use various aspects of the library. As an extension to reading simple instructions, students are required to write instructions on using various machines or installations involved in library use. This begins with entering the library through the card-gate system, proceeding to checking out books using the automatic borrowing system, and then moving to use of the on-line catalog (OPAC) and

other means of seeking information. Library staff cooperate in introducing OPAC and other resources such as CD-ROMs. The final goal is to produce a booklet of instructions in English at the end of the fifteen-week term. A full report on this project will be produced at a later date.

Conclusion

There are several ways in which the above tasks can be extended and improved. A stronger connection between class content and worksheet tasks would be helpful. Working with the library staff to provide instruction using English as the language of presentation is a possibility. At the graduate level, requiring outside resources in practice research papers would make the papers more realistic as well as adding the immediate need that makes instruction more effective.

As I believe that increased knowledge of and comfort with use of the library is of benefit, I hope to make an indirect contribution to the success of my students' studies in engineering as well as in English. In the process of exploring the library and its use, they are expanding their use of English and their awareness of the role of English in the world of published research in science and engineering.

However, there are limitations to the depth of library instruction that can be offered through the medium of English classes. It is difficult to go beyond the general orientation level to that of true bibliographic instruction. Ideally, higher education in Japan will move in the directions being taken in the U.S. and U.K., integrating bibliographic instruction into courses in the students' majors.

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Notes

- (1) According to Fujino (1998:137), some universities in Japan offer a two-credit undergraduate course called "Introduction to the Library". He supports extending the course to include issues of copyright and including faculty to teach about discipline-specific resources.
- (2) I am familiar with this program through personal experience, as a member of the class of '84. However, Earlham is widely known for undergraduate bibliographic instruction, as is shown not only from numerous articles but also the devotion of a book to the subject (Hardesty et al., 1993).
- (3) These teachers and others also give examples of bibliographic instruction as key components of classes designed for non-majors.
- (4) The first approach described was an assignment for an English 32B class, fall 1997, and the second for an English 31B class, spring 1998.

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